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(54) **High intensity focused ultrasound system**

(57) There is provided a high intensity focused ultrasound system, which includes a combination head unit for producing first ultrasound signals for removing a first region to focus and transmit the signals onto the first region, producing second ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the first region to focus and transmit them onto the first region, receiving ultrasound echo signals reflected from the first region; and acquiring image signals for forming an image of a second region, wherein the first and second ultrasound signals penetrate

through the second region onto the first region. The system further includes: a high frequency power supply unit, an image processor for forming the 3D ultrasound image and the second region image; an operation controller for producing control signals for controlling an operation of the combination head unit; an operator for operating the combination head unit based on the control signals; and a display unit for displaying the images.

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Description

[0001] The present application claims priority from Korean Patent Application No. 10-2005-120581 filed on December 9, 2005, the entire subject matter of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

1. Field

[0002] The present invention generally relates to an ultrasound diagnostic system, and more particularly to a high intensity focused ultrasound system.

2. Background

[0003] An ultrasound diagnostic system has become an important and popular diagnostic tool due to its wide range of applications. Specifically, due to its non-invasive and non-destructive nature, the ultrasound diagnostic system has been extensively used in the medical profession. Modern high-performance ultrasound diagnostic systems and techniques are commonly used to produce two or three-dimensional (2D or 3D) diagnostic images of a target object. The ultrasound diagnostic system generally uses a probe including an array transducer having a plurality of transducer elements to transmit and receive ultrasound signals. The ultrasound diagnostic system forms ultrasound images of the internal structures of the target object by electrically exciting the transducer elements to generate ultrasound pulses that travel into the target object. The ultrasound pulses produce ultrasound echoes since they are reflected from a discontinuous surface of acoustic impedance of the internal structure, which appears as discontinuities to the propagating ultrasound pulses. Various ultrasound echoes return to the array transducer and are converted into electrical signals, which are amplified and processed to produce ultrasound data for forming an image of the internal structure of the target object.

[0004] In particular, a high intensity focused ultrasound system is renowned to produce excellent treatment effects in the medical field. The high intensity focused ultrasound system uses high intensity focused ultrasound in order to remove a lesion (e.g., malignant tumor) from the human tissues. Conventionally, the high intensity focused ultrasound system transmits high intensity focused ultrasound onto the lesion to remove the lesion, while displaying a 2-dimensional ultrasound image of said lesion. However, the conventional high intensity focused ultrasound system is characterized by the following problems.

[0005] First, when the lesion is to be removed by using the high intensity focused ultrasound system, a region for treating the lesion is defined by the number of slices containing the lesion and distances between the slices. In treatment, the lesion is checked and examined by us-

ing a 2D ultrasound image of each slice. Since high intensity focused ultrasound used for removing the lesion is 3-dimensionally formed with a predetermined width, such an ultrasound beam may affect the tissues of slices that are adjacent to the currently treated slice during treatment. Thus, it is necessary to check other slices adjacent to the currently treated slice. Conventionally, a treatment head of the high intensity focused ultrasound system should be moved to provide ultrasound images of other slices. As such, it is impossible to check the other slices except the currently treated slice. Therefore, it is difficult to accurately check and examine the overall tissue state in real time during treatment.

[0006] Further, the conventional high intensity focused ultrasound system employs a phased array probe for transmitting ultrasound signals to the lesion and receiving ultrasound echo signals reflected from the lesion. Such a probe is typically a sector probe, which provides a 2D ultrasound image at a low resolution for the lesion located deep in the body.

[0007] Moreover, the conventional high intensity focused ultrasound system can damage the skin. For example, when the size of a lesion is significant as shown in FIG. 1A, a treatment head 3 should be moved to change a focus 16 of high intensity focused ultrasound generated from the treatment head 3. In such a case, since their sound fields overlap, damage (e.g., burn) to the skin 11 may be caused. Further, when the lesion 15 is disposed close to the skin 11 as shown in FIG. 1B, this may also damage the skin 11. Generally, the treatment head 3 of the conventional high intensity focused ultrasound system is installed at a bottom of the probe to be faced to the skin 11, thereby making it difficult to check the skin damage in real time.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Arrangements and embodiments may be described in detail with reference to the following drawings in which like reference numerals refer to like elements and wherein:

[0009] FIGS. 1A and 1B are diagrams illustrating a conventional high intensity focused ultrasound system capable of causing skin damage;

[0010] FIG. 2 illustrates a high intensity focused ultrasound system constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0011] FIG. 3 illustrates a combination treatment head constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0012] FIG. 4 illustrates a combination treatment head constructed in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

[0013] FIGS. 5A to 5D illustrate various activation states for elements of a transducer included in a 2D array probe;

[0014] FIG. 6 illustrates a combination treatment head constructed in accordance with yet another embodiment

of the present invention; and

[0015] FIG. 7 illustrates an ultrasound image formed by the combination treatment head constructed in accordance with still yet another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016] A detailed description may be provided with reference to the accompanying drawings. One of ordinary skill in the art may realize that the following description is illustrative only and is not in any way limiting. Other embodiments of the present invention may readily suggest themselves to such skilled persons having the benefit of this disclosure.

[0017] One embodiment of the present invention will be described below with reference to FIGS. 2 and 3. FIG. 2 illustrates a high intensity focused ultrasound system constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. However, other arrangements may also be used.

[0018] As shown in FIG. 2, a high intensity focused ultrasound system 100 may include a combination treatment head (combination head) 110, a high frequency power supply 120, an image processor 130, an operation controller 140, an operation unit 150 and a display unit 160. Further, the high intensity focused ultrasound system 100 may also include a container for containing a medium, which is disposed between the combination treatment head 110 and a human body (i.e., skin). Such a medium is used to transmit a high intensity focused ultrasound generated from the combination treatment head 110 to a lesion in the human body. The above container may be a water tank, a water bag and the like.

[0019] As shown in FIG. 3, the combination treatment head 110 may include a high intensity ultrasound transducer 111, a probe 112, an imaging unit 113 and a light source 114. The high intensity ultrasound transducer 111 may generate a high intensity focused ultrasound based on high frequency power provided from the high frequency power supply 120. It then transmits the high intensity focused ultrasound onto the lesion in the human body so as to remove the lesion from the human tissues. The probe 112 may transmit focused ultrasound signals to the lesion along a transmit scanline and receive ultrasound echo signals reflected from the lesion to acquire a 3D ultrasound image of the lesion in the body. The probe 112 may be configured as a 3D probe to obtain a 3D ultrasound image. The image unit 113 may produce a real-time image of the skin disposed between the combination treatment head 110 and the lesion, to which the high intensity focused ultrasound is transmitted from the combination treatment head 110. Thus, the skin can be prevented from being damaged (i.e., burned) by the high intensity focused ultrasound through using the real-time image of the skin. The imaging unit 113 may be any imaging device (e.g., miniature camera, CCTV camera, etc.) capable of being installed in the combination treat-

ment head 110. The light source 114 may illuminate light to the skin, which allows the imaging unit 113 to produce a brighter skin image. The light source 114 may be any light source (e.g., high-brightness LED) capable of being installed in the combination treatment head 110.

[0020] Referring now back to FIG. 2, the high frequency power supply 120 may generate a high frequency power to be applied to the high intensity ultrasound transducer 111 of the combination treatment head 110. The image processor 130 may form a 3D ultrasound image of the lesion based on the ultrasound echo signals transmitted from the probe 112 and a skin image based on the skin image signals transmitted from the imaging unit 113. It may then form a 3D ultrasound image of the lesion based on the ultrasound echo signals and a skin image based on the skin image signals. Although not shown in FIG. 2, the image processor 130 may further include a beamformer, an image signal processor, a scan converter, a rendering unit and the like. The operation controller 140 may produce control signals for controlling the operation of the combination treatment head 110 such that the high intensity focused ultrasound generated from the combination treatment head 110 is transmitted to the lesion. The operation unit 150 may operate the combination treatment head 110 based on the control signals outputted from the operation controller 140. The display unit 160 may display the 3D ultrasound image of the lesion and the skin image formed in the image processor 130.

[0021] Another embodiment of the present invention will be described below with reference to FIGS. 4 to 5D. FIG. 4 illustrates a combination treatment head constructed in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0022] As shown in FIG. 4, a combination treatment head 210 may include a high intensity ultrasound transducer 111, a 2D array probe 212, an imaging unit 113 and a light source 114. In the combination treatment head 210, the high intensity ultrasound transducer 111, the imaging unit 113 and the light source 114 may have substantially the same functions as those in the combination treatment head 110 shown in FIG. 3. The same reference numerals are given to avoid any repeated descriptions thereof.

[0023] The 2D array probe 212 may include a transducer having M x N elements. The 2D array probe 212 may acquire ultrasound echo signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image while altering the activation of the elements of the transducer. As shown in FIG. 4, the elements may be divided into two groups of activated elements 212a and inactivated elements 212b. Moreover, the elements of the 2D array probe 212 may have various activation states such as horizontal activation (FIG. 5A), vertical activation (FIG. 5B) and diagonal activation (FIGS. 5C and 5D).

[0024] A further embodiment of the present invention will be described below with reference to FIG. 6.

[0025] FIG. 6 illustrates a combination treatment head constructed in accordance with yet another embodiment

of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 6, a combination treatment head 310 may include a transducer 311, an imaging unit 113 and a light source 114. In the combination treatment head 310, the imaging unit 113 and the light source 114 may have substantially the same functions as those in the combination treatment head 110 shown in FIG. 3. The same reference numerals are given to avoid any repeated descriptions thereof.

[0026] The transducer 311 may produce high intensity focused ultrasound for removing the lesion from the tissues in the body and ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the lesion. It may alternately transmit the high intensity focused ultrasound for removing the lesion and the ultrasound signals for forming the 3D ultrasound image onto the lesion in the body. The high intensity focused ultrasound for removing the lesion and the ultrasound signals for forming the 3D ultrasound image produced by the transducer 311 may have different frequencies, powers and transmit waveforms. In such a case, the transducer 311 may be configured with elements arranged in a concave array such that the focus of the high intensity focused ultrasound is positioned at an image plane acquired by the ultrasound signals for forming the 3D ultrasound image of the lesion.

[0027] Further, as shown in FIG. 7, the transducer 311 may form ultrasound images 331 and 332 perpendicular to each other by arranging the central elements 321 to be smaller than the other elements 322 in a different way. By using the ultrasound image 331 perpendicular to the ultrasound image 332, the shape and size of the lesion can be more accurately examined.

[0028] As described above, in the present disclosure, the 3D probe or the 2D array probe is used instead of the phased array probe, thereby making it possible to check the slices adjacent to the present slice as well as the present slice by using a motor in the 3D probe or altering the activation of the transducer elements included in the 2D array probe without moving the combination treatment head of the high intensity focused ultrasound system. Thus, the treatment state can be checked and examined in real time. Further, the ultrasound image of the lesion at a high resolution can be obtained in case of using the 2D array probe.

[0029] Further, in the present disclosure, the imaging unit and the light source are disposed close to the probe of the combination treatment head to provide a real-time image of the skin existing between the combination treatment head and the lesion. Thus, the skin state can be checked and examined in real time to prevent the skin from being damaged.

[0030] An embodiment may be achieved in whole or in part by a high intensity focused ultrasound system, which includes a combination head unit for: producing first ultrasound signals for removing a first region to focus and transmit the first ultrasound signals onto the first region; producing second ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the first region to focus and transmit the second ultrasound signals onto the first region;

receiving ultrasound echo signals reflected from the first region; and acquiring image signals for forming an image of a second region, wherein the first and second ultrasound signals penetrate through the second region onto the first region. It also includes: a high frequency power supply unit for generating a high frequency power to be applied to the combination head unit; an image processor for forming the 3D ultrasound image of the first region based on the ultrasound echo signals and the image of the second region based on the image signals; an operation controller for producing control signals for controlling an operation of the combination head unit such that at the first ultrasound signals are focused on the first region; an operating unit for operating the combination head unit based on the control signals outputted from the operation controller, and a display unit for displaying the 3D ultrasound image of the first region and the image of the second region.

[0031] Any reference in this specification to "one embodiment," "an embodiment," "example embodiment," etc. means that a particular feature, structure or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of such phrases in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment. Further, when a particular feature, structure of characteristic is described in connection with any embodiment, it falls within the purview of one skilled in the art to effect such feature, structure or characteristic in connection with other ones of the embodiments.

[0032] Although embodiments have been described with reference to a number of illustrative embodiments thereof, it should be understood that numerous other modifications and embodiments can be devised by those skilled in the art that will fall within the spirit and scope of the principles of this disclosure. More particularly, various variations and modifications are possible in the component parts and/or arrangements of the subject combination arrangement within the scope of the disclosure, the drawings and the appended claims. In addition to variations and modifications in the component parts and/or arrangements, alternative uses will also be apparent to those skilled in the art

Claims

1. A high intensity focused ultrasound system, comprising:

a combination head unit for producing first ultrasound signals for removing a first region to focus and transmit the first ultrasound signals onto the first region, the combination head unit being configured to produce second ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the first region to focus and transmit the second ultrasound signals onto the first region, the combination head

- unit further being configured to receive ultrasound echo signals reflected from the first region and acquiring image signals for forming an image of a second region, wherein the first and second ultrasound signals penetrate through the second region onto the first region;
 a high frequency power supply unit for generating a high frequency power to be applied to the combination head unit;
 an image processor for forming the 3D ultrasound image of the first region based on the ultrasound echo signals and the image of the second region based on the image signals;
 an operation controller for producing control signals for controlling an operation of the combination head unit such that the first ultrasound signals are focused on the first region;
 an operating unit for operating the combination head unit based on the control signals outputted from the operation controller, and
 a display unit for displaying the 3D ultrasound image of the first region and the image of the second region.
2. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 1, wherein the combination head unit includes:
- a first transducer for producing the first ultrasound signals based on the high frequency power applied from the high frequency power supply unit to focus and transmit the first ultrasound signals onto the first region;
 a probe for producing the second ultrasound signals to focus and transmit the second ultrasound signals onto the first region, the probe further being configured to receive ultrasound echo signals reflected from the first region; and
 an imaging unit for acquiring the image signals for forming the image of the second region.
3. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 2, wherein the probe is a 3D probe.
4. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 2, wherein the probe is a 2D array probe including a transducer with a number of elements.
5. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 1, further comprising a light source for illuminating light to the second region imaged by the imaging unit.
6. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 5, wherein the light source is a high-brightness LED.
7. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 1, wherein the combination head unit includes:
- a second transducer for producing the first and second ultrasound signals to alternately focus and transmit the first and second ultrasound signals onto the first region; and
 an imaging unit for acquiring the image signals for forming the image of the second region.
8. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 7, wherein the second transducer has a number of elements arranged in a concave array.
9. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 7, further comprising a light source for illuminating light to the second region imaged by the imaging unit.
10. The high intensity focused ultrasound system of Claim 9, wherein the light source is a high-brightness LED.
11. A combination head for use in a high intensity focused ultrasound system, comprising:
- a third transducer for producing first ultrasound signals for removing a first region to focus and transmit the first ultrasound signals onto the first region;
 a probe for producing second ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the first region to focus and transmit the second ultrasound signals onto the first region, the probe being configured to receive ultrasound echo signals reflected from the first region; and
 an imaging unit for acquiring image signals for forming an image of a second region, wherein the first and second ultrasound signals penetrate through the second region onto the first region.
12. The combination head of Claim 11, wherein the probe is a 3D probe.
13. The combination head of Claim 11, wherein the probe is a 2D array probe including a transducer with a number of elements.
14. The combination head of Claim 11, further comprising a light source for illuminating light to the second region imaged by the imaging unit.
15. The combination head of Claim 14, wherein the light source is a high-brightness LED.
16. A combination head for use in a high intensity focused ultrasound system, comprising:
- a fourth transducer for producing first ultrasound signals for removing a first region and second

ultrasound signals for forming a 3D ultrasound image of the first region to alternately focus and transmit the first and second ultrasound signals onto the first region; and
an imaging unit for acquiring image signals for forming an image of a second region, wherein the first and second ultrasound signals penetrate through the second region onto the first region.

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17. The combination head of Claim 16, wherein the fourth transducer has a number of elements arranged in a concave array.

18. The combination head of Claim 17, wherein the elements of the fourth transducer are divided into two groups of a first size and a second size smaller than the first size.

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19. The combination head of Claim 16, further comprising a light source for illuminating light to the second region imaged by the imaging unit.

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20. The combination head of Claim 19, wherein the light source is a high-brightness LED.

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FIG. 1A
(PRIOR ART)

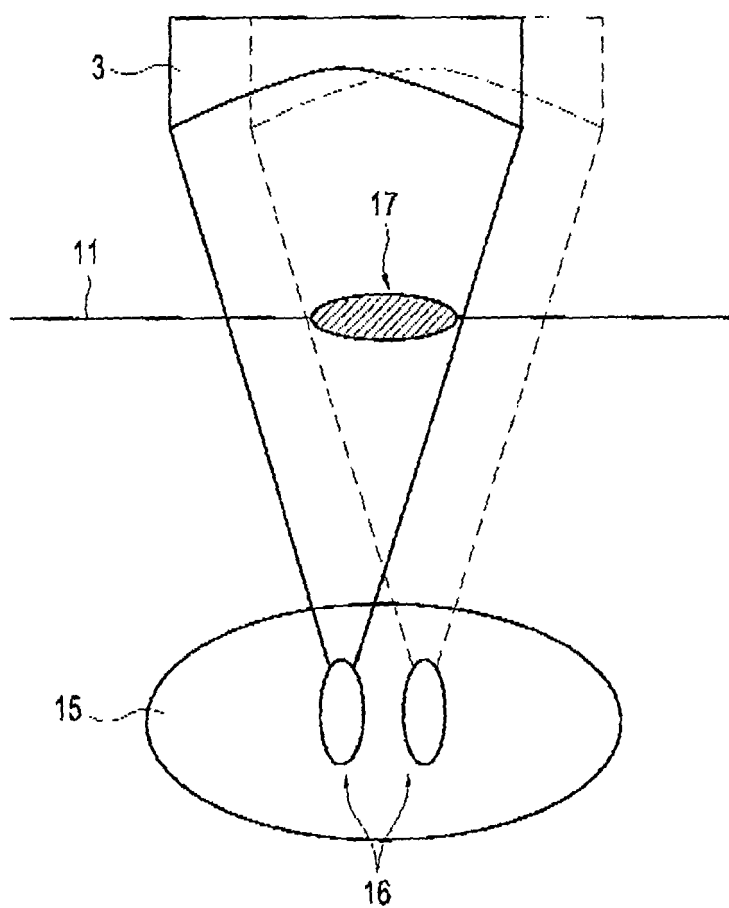


FIG. 1B
(PRIOR ART)

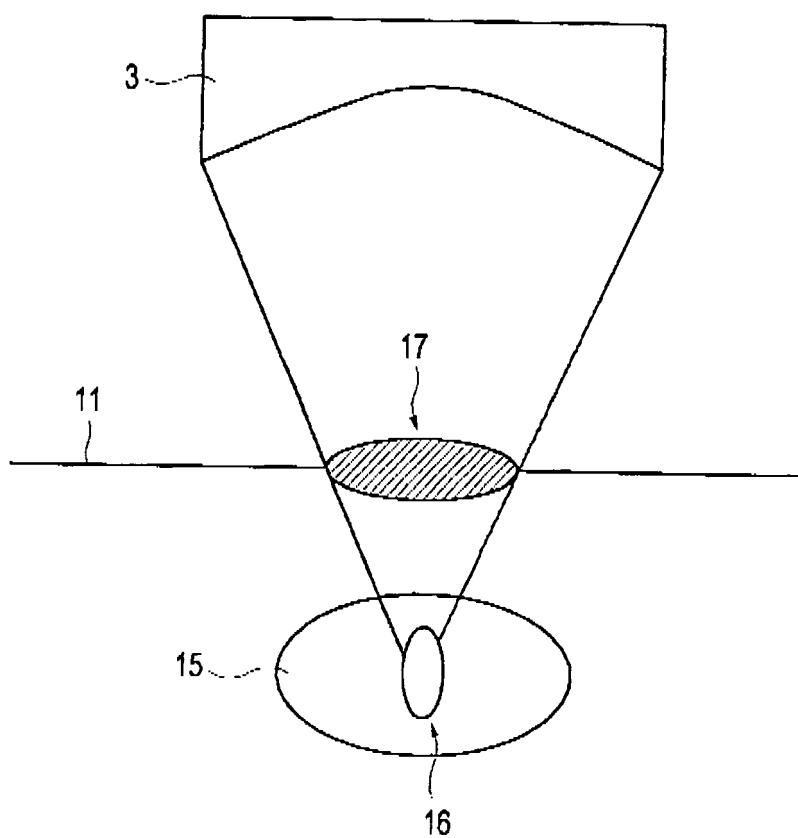


FIG. 2

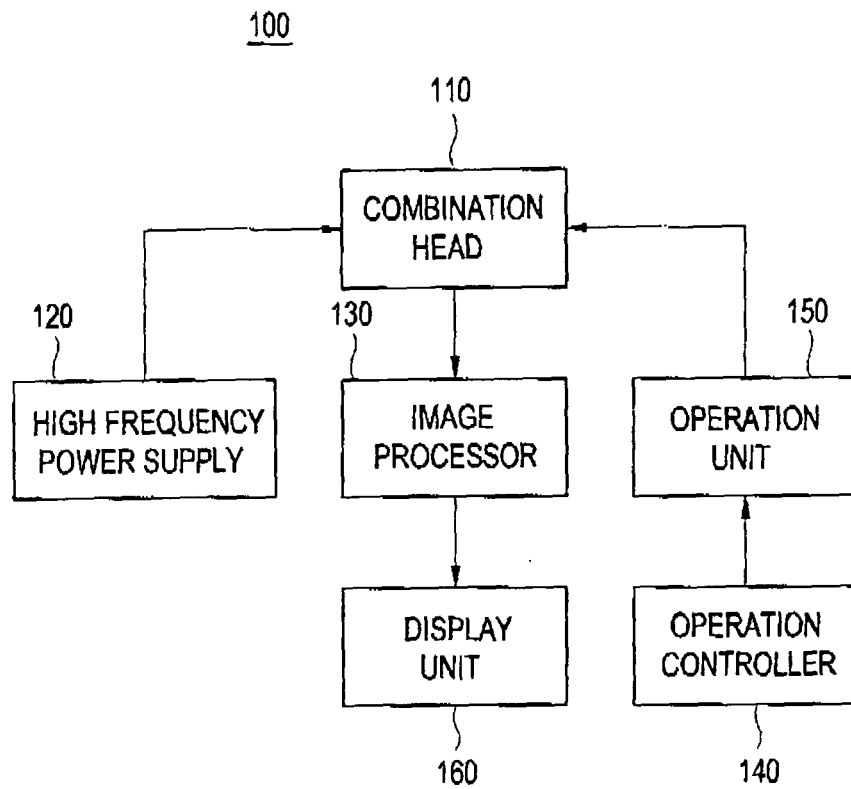


FIG. 3

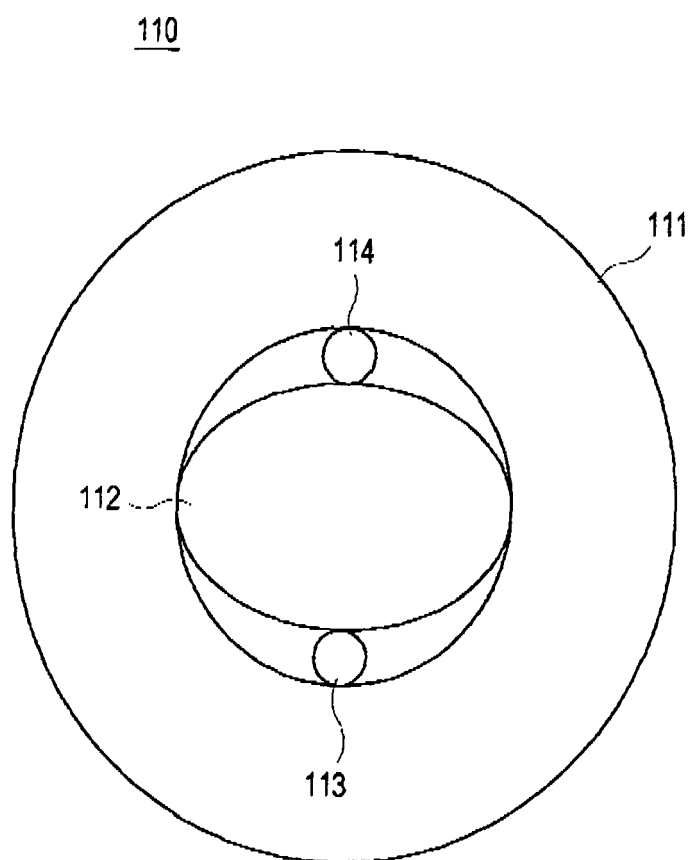


FIG. 4

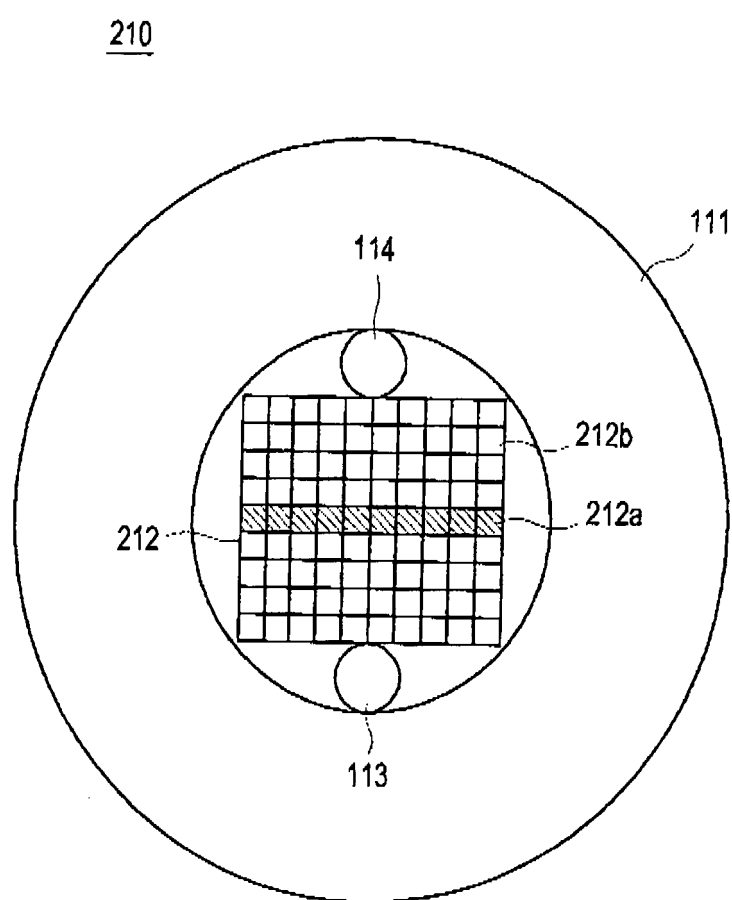


FIG. 5A

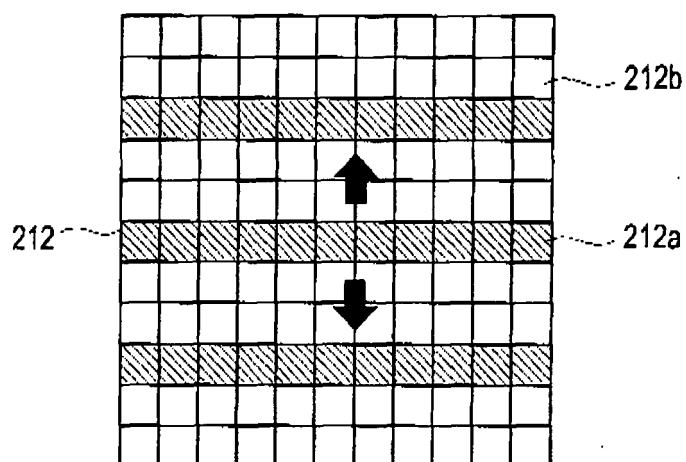


FIG. 5B

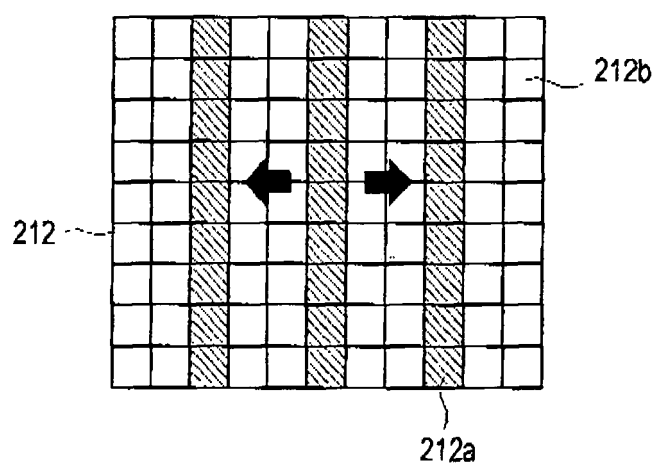


FIG. 5C

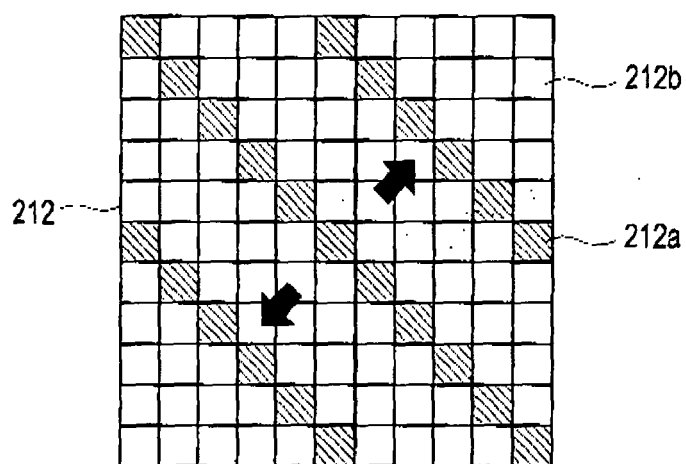


FIG. 5D

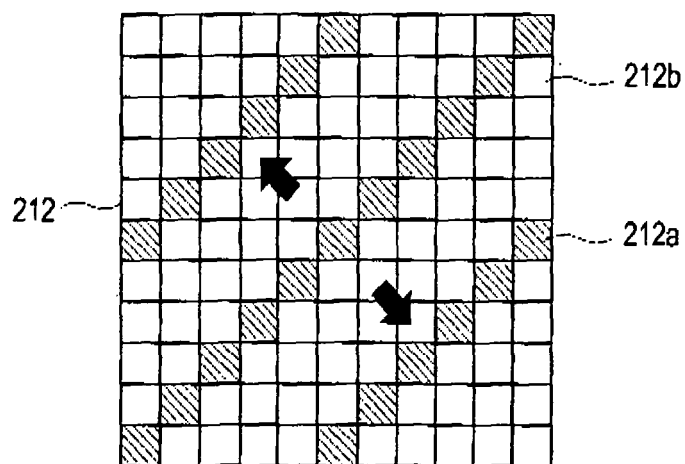


FIG. 6

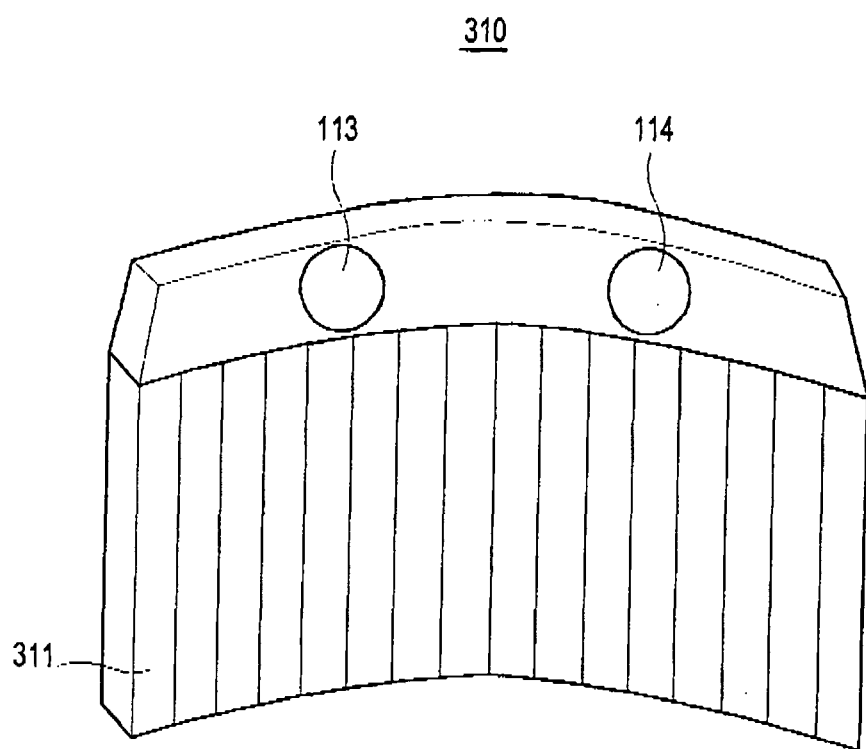
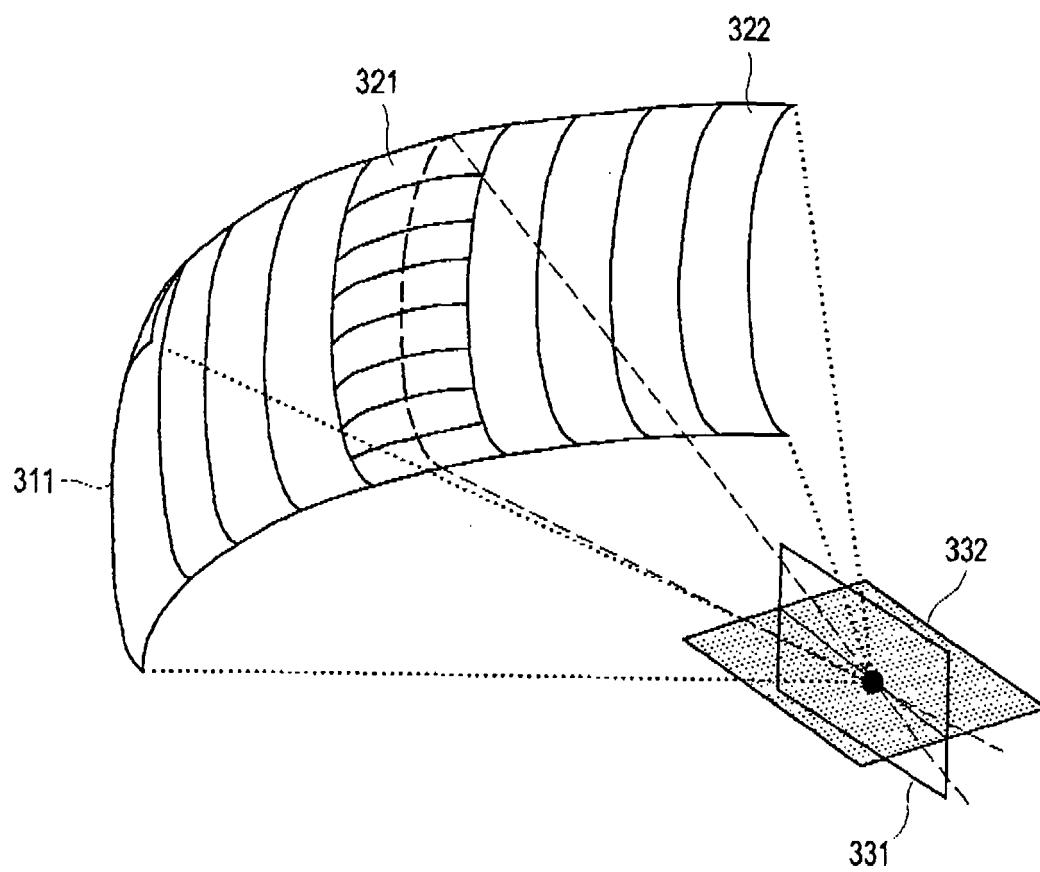


FIG. 7





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 06 02 5194

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
X	US 2004/267253 A1 (KLOTZ CONRAD LEE [US] ET AL KLOTZ CONRAD LEE [US] ET AL) 30 December 2004 (2004-12-30) * paragraphs [0020] - [0026] * * paragraphs [0040] - [0058] * * figures 1-3 *	1-4,7,8, 11-13, 16-18	INV. A61B8/08 G01S15/89 A61N7/02
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X	US 6 428 477 B1 (MASON MARTIN K [US]) 6 August 2002 (2002-08-06) * column 2, line 40 - column 3, line 38 * * column 4, line 49 - column 7, line 55 * * figures 1-4 *	1-4,7,8, 11-13, 16-18	
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search Berlin		Date of completion of the search 19 March 2007	Examiner Abraham, Volkhard
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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EP 06 02 5194

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
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19-03-2007

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REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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